

Luther Utterback

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Luther Ellsworth Utterback (July 18, 1947 – May 28, 1997) was an [American](#) artist,^[1] primarily working in [sculpture](#) and [painting](#). He was known for his large scale installations^[2] in public spaces^[3] and corporate buildings.^[4]

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Personal Life and Work [edit source]

Utterback was born in Texas, the only child of Rev. Glenn Lester Utterback and Ruth Henderickson Utterback.^[5] Reverend Utterback soon moved his family to [Nashua, Iowa](#)^[6] so he could pastor the [Little Brown Church](#).

Luther studied sculpture and drawing at the [University of Iowa](#), earning a Bachelor of Fine Arts in 1970, a Master of Arts in 1972, and a Master of Fine Arts in 1973. While attending graduate school, he also served as a teaching assistant for sculpture and 3D design classes.

Career [edit source]

In 1974, Utterback began serving as an instructor for the Department of Art and Art History at the University of Iowa. In 1975-1976, he was a visiting artist at the [University of Wisconsin-Platteville](#). It was during this time, in early 1976, that the University of Iowa held a competition for a structural sculpture to be placed on the university's campus, near the [Hancher Auditorium](#).^[7] Utterback was chosen, and, later in 1976, he completed the piece, which he entitled, “Untitled.”^{[8][9]}

Utterback moved to [Brooklyn, New York](#) in 1976. There he created a series of drawings on mylar, linen, and paper. He returned to [Des Moines](#) in 1979, after receiving a commission to create an art installation in the state capitol grounds of the Hoover State Office Building in Des Moines.^{[10][11]} That year he began construction on the piece he titled, “Five Stones, One Tree”.^[12] The piece as completed in 1980.

Over the years, Utterback shifted his life back and forth between Iowa and New York. During the 1980s, he traveled around the United States, and also to Venezuela and Italy, producing two exhibitions in the latter's port city of [Bari](#).

In 1994, Utterback self-published—with the help of his friend and ex-roommate,^[13] [Steven Vail](#)—a volume of his writings, entitled, “Seminary Of The Wild: “Why Not” For The Wobble In The Wave”.

In 1996, Utterback returned to New York to begin designing a large project, a 1,000-acre piece was intended as a planting reserve, incorporating four limestone “pyramid” structures and land covenants.^[14] Before he could begin construction of this project, and two weeks before his planned first exhibition in Brooklyn, Utterback was struck by a taxi, went into a coma, and died five weeks later at the age of 49 on May 28, 1997.

Posthumous events [edit source]

In December, 1999, an exhibition of Utterback's later drawings and paintings was held by his friend Steven Vail, at Vail's gallery. In November 2004, the Karolyn Sherwood Gallery ran an exhibition, “Private Collections Uncovered,” that featured Utterback's massive, three-painting series, called “Man, Woman, Child.” In 2014, Utterback's hometown, Nashua, Iowa, was given an \$80,000 grant through Iowa's Living Roadways Community Visioning Program; the money has been designated for construction of Utterback's unrealized design, titled “Dream Project”.^[15]

Selected works [edit source]

- “Untitled” - a stone installation on the campus of the University of Iowa, near the Hancher Auditorium. It consists of four large, rectangular, limestone blocks: three blocks standing, one block laying on its side.^[16] The blocks were cut at the Reed Quarries in [Bloomington, Indiana](#), each block weighing approximately 40 tons. They were transported to [Iowa City](#) via train, where Utterback positioned them according to his design.
- “Five Stones, One Tree” - An art installation in the green space of the Hoover State Office Building in Des Moines.^[17] It consists of two rough-cut limestone pillars, each containing two large stones, standing about 22 feet apart. The stones are oriented so that their smoothly textured sides face east and west, and their adjacent, naturally accreted sides face north and south. Between these pillars, the earth has settled in the form of a rectangle over a 16-ton block of limestone buried 6 feet below the surface.^[18] A Japanese ginkgo tree completed the design, forming an isosceles triangle between it and the two pillars. The Greater Des Moines Public Art Foundation wrote an interpretation and review of the piece.^[6]

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